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ABSTRACT

Emerging adolescents should have ample opportunities to present creative ideas in written form. Some generalizations may be helpful in identifying and understanding the creative student. Creative people have been found to possess the following traits (Iris Tiedt, 1983): nonconformity of ideas, egotism and feelings of destiny, great curiosity, a sense of humor and playfulness, perseverance on self-started projects, intense emotions and sincerity, a tendency to be shy, and lack of rigidity. An emerging adolescent who lacks rigidity in writing is open to new ideas and experiments with the original, the novel, and the unique. Joy, which comes from an intrinsic desire to create and to communicate, is inherent in the ongoing and completed written product. Interest in writing is intense, and meaningful experiences are communicated. Motivation to achieve, develop, and grow is sequential and continuous. The creative middle school teacher sets the stage, provides readiness experiences, and stimulates and encourages emerging adolescents to appreciate and intrinsically value creativity in school and in society. (SR)

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CREATIVE WRITING AND THE MIDDLE SCHOOL STUDENT

Creativity stresses the new, the unique, and the novel. Originality of ideas is salient due to improved changes which might well be an end result in school and in society. Emerging adolescents should have ample opportunities to present creative ideas in written form. The learner and the curriculum become one, not separate entities, when that which is within comes forth in a process to that which is observable, such as a product of writing.

Numerous studies have been made of creative beings to determine possessed traits. Tiedt[1] summarized the following traits from a research study conducted:

> MacKinnon studied more than 500 famous people--writers, architects, composers--who were judged by their peers to be creative. He found that in general these artists had disliked school, did not identify with teachers, and had in many cases dropped out of school.
>
> This study and others which followed resulted in a body of generalizations about the creative person which may prove helpful as we attempt to identify and to understand the creative student. The creative person has been found to possess the following traits:
>
> 1. Nonconformity of ideas, but not necessarily of dress and behavior.
> 2. Egotism and feelings of destiny
> 3. Great curiosity, desire to discover the answer.
> 4. Sense of humor and playfulness.
> 5. Perseverance on self-started projects.
> 6. Intense emotions, sincerity.
> 7. Tendency to be shy.
> 8. Lack of rigidity.

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To encourage nonconformity, the language arts teacher needs to eliminate formal, assigned lessons. The formal must give way to the informal. An informal classroom assists learners to self-select topics to pursue in writing. The content in the written product must be owned by the student, not the teacher nor the textbook. With personal ownership, the learner may try out new ideas in an innovative writing curriculum. What is within the student in terms of beliefs, values, ideals, and attitudes, needs to come to the surface. Thus that which is intrinsic might well provide subject matter for writing. The young writer needs to feel that he/she can be a nonconformist in expressing ideas of intrinsic worth.

The language arts teacher needs to set the stage for creative writing. Flexibility and open-endedness are two viable concepts to stress in providing emerging adolescents readiness experiences for writing. From the readiness activities, the learner chooses the title and type of prose or poetry to write. What is important is that middle school students write and write some more. Learning by doing is vital! Thus to improve in creative writing, opportunities need to be present to write where originality is in evidence. Off-beat ideas are to be encouraged. Others must not criticize that which is creative. The nonconformist in

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writing needs encouragement and rewards for presenting that which is different and beautiful.

Egotism in Writing

A strong ego is needed to reveal more about the self. Personal interests, needs, and purposes must come to the forefront in creative writing endeavors. The ego has its multiple strengths and reveals these in an atmosphere of freedom. To express and communicate to a different beat of a drummer takes courage. There are always those who believe that right answers in life exist.

Individuals possessing strong egos do not ask for approval from others nor do they seek patterns to conform to in writing. Rather, egotism stresses leaning upon one's own ideas and trusting the results. Goals and purposes come from the worth individuals feel and possess. What is within might well represent the good, the true, and the beautiful. High goals in writing are sought and they are accomplished. The self is the setter of goals and appraiser of achievement. He/she does not look to others for objectives in ideas for writing nor for evaluation to determine that which represents quality.

Background experiences might well come from exploring fantasy literature and creating one's own world, according to Beach and Marshall[2] who wrote:

The increasing popularity of fantasy literature among adolescent readers suggests its one overriding characteristic--it portrays an alternative version of a real world adolescents perceive to be uncertain at best. While the distinction between fantasy and science fiction is not always clear, fantasy usually creates a wholly different, timeless world, while science fiction, although set in the future, is often a projection of our actual, pragmatic, scientific world. Because fantasy is not bound by the laws of physical nature or relationships, it can create its own self-contained world constituted by that world's own internal logic. J. R. R. Tolkien defines this world as the "secondary" world, distinct from the "primary" world. The worlds of Alice's Adventures in Wonderland (Lewis Carroll), The Wonderful Wizard of Oz (L. Frank Baum), The Wind in the Willows (Kenneth Grahame), The Lord of the Rings (J. R. R. Tolkien), The Earthsea Trilogy (Ursula Le Guin), or The Watership Down (Richard Adams) invite the reader to imagine experience as infused with larger mythic, spiritual meanings. From that experience, readers revise their perceptions of their own real world.

Creativity in Writing

Perceiving gaps in knowledge requires thought and research to synthesize concepts and generalizations. The curious mind desires to learn, to find out, and to achieve. Motivation is there to learn and to secure subject matter. Curiosity is in evidence to perceive that which satisfies, converges, and diverges in human thought. Perceiving ideas from a new perspective adds to the knowledge base of the student. Original ways of looking at objects, items, and abstractions increase the learner's means of comprehension for a variety of purposes and reasons.

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A lack of rigidity is inherent in writing. Thus the middle school student is curious in perceiving diverse approaches in writing prose. Exploring unique ways of presenting characters, setting of the story, plot, theme, irony, point of view, and sequence is of great interest to the writer. Writing different types of poetry provides opportunities to explore subject matter, beauty in language, metaphors and similies, rhyme, as well as unrhymed verse. Among the many types of verse that can be written include couplets, triplets, quatrains, limericks, free verse, diamantes, haiku, tanka, and septolets. The emergent adolescent is the chooser of content and type of verse to write. Being curious to try alliteration and onomatopeia in writing poetry adds to the students fund of knowledge in utilizing poetic devices.

Playfulness with Ideas

Creative writing emphasizes playing with ideas. Absoluteness does not exist here. Rather, choices, decisions, newness, and openess are key concepts to stress in teaching-learning situations. The middle school student tends to enjoy inductive and learning by discovery methods of instruction. Brainstorming is important when playing with ideas.

To brainstorm ideas on a topic, ideas are generated. No value judgements are made at the time ideas are presented

in brainstorming. As each learner presents an idea, these can be written on the chalkboard or transparency and numbered. Thus students may not duplicate ideas presented previously. What might students brainstorm?

The writer has supervised many student teachers in the public schools. One sixth grade student teacher guided learners to give all the uses for a tin can possible. After the nineteenth use was given, the middle school students found it difficult to think of additional uses. Higher levels of cognition indeed are in evidence when the twentieth and additional uses are mentioned. These emerging adolescents, however, enjoyed the learning activity. Students then took one of the uses and wrote a related paragraph, short story, or poem. The student made the selection for the topic and the content contained therein.

Perseverance and Writing

Creative individuals tend to complete what has been started. Interest, motivation, and desire make the creative writer wish to finish the ongoing writing activity. Feelings of failure are minimized. Rather, the will to pursue and to accomplish is there. Once the task has been determined, the emerging adolescent likes to perceive closure. However, the closure of a writing experience might well open new doors to additional activities. New

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springboards for writing accrue. There is no end to writing goals, but more writing, creative in nature.

The middle school student desires to fill gaps in knowledge with original ideas. Spontaneity of content propels the learner to move forward and attain. This movement stresses perseverance. Motives and incentives reside within the writer, not the teacher nor the textbook(s). Intrinsic motivation comes from stimulation and unique ideas of the emerging adolescent. The student trusts his/her own ideas which come forth in creative prose or poetry.

Giving up, not having achieved, and feeling discouraged are not a part of the creative being. Inner strengths and courage abound. Working toward goal attainment in writing is a must. To persevere means to progress from beginning to end to a new beginning in writing.

Intense Emotions and Writing

Middle school students are human beings with diverse feelings. Feelings are important to consider when teaching emerging adolescents. The teacher needs to emphasize an adequate number of attitudinal objectives in the teaching and learning arena. Too frequently, cognitive objectives predominate in ongoing lessons and units of study. However, quality attitudes need emphasis so that all facets of the middle school student's development may be stressed. Thus

the intellectual, social, emotional, and physical facets of development need stimulation and encouragement. Learning opportunities selected to guide student attainment in each of the four facets of development are vital. These four interact with each other. Quality emotions (attitudes, feelings, values, and beliefs) assist students to achieve more optimally in intellectual, social, and physical development.

The emotions of students might well find a good outlet in creative writing. Feelings vary from individual to individual as well as have variation from moment to moment within the person. Thus, learners have many and diverse feelings to reveal in writing. Feelings of joy, happiness, elation, sadness, grief, disappointment and love are experienced by all. These feelings should provide the raw material for creative writing.

Shyness Tendencies

Creative learners might feel reserved, at times, in sharing written content with others. No doubt, minimizing by others of the unique and the original is a cause. Middle school teachers need to reward learners for creative ideas and products. A positive nod of the head, a rewarding smile, or simple words of praise for the creative might assist emerging adolescents to overcome feelings of being reserved and rigid.

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Creativity needs to be a definite goal of instruction. Learning opportunities must be implemented which harmonize with the overall goal of creativity. A variety of opportunities in learning need to be in the offing to provide for individual differences. Each learner is unique and needs readiness experiences which inspire, encourage, and respect individuals. Relying on the self, having lofty standards, and trusting the self are ideal concepts for creative students and teachers to follow. Shyness tendencies might then be minimized or eliminated. Being oneself and accepting the self are necessary to overcome feelings of doubt and mistrust.

The middle school teacher has a difficult task in guiding a classroom environment which accepts, not rejects; welcomes new ideas, not traditional content alone; assists, not hinders; is positive, not negative; and encourages, rather than discourages.

Creative writing of middle school students should be shared voluntarily, not forced. Small group or peer endeavors should be the focal point of initial shared experiences in writing, be it prose or poetry.

Lack of Rigidity in Writing and Conclusion

The concept <u>lack of rigidity</u>, no doubt, summarizes well all traits of the creative being. Thus a flexible writer might well:

1. be a nonconformist.
2. have feelings of egotism.
3. emphasize curiousity in life's endeavors.
4. enjoy playing with ideas.
5. persevere until tasks are completed.
6. possess strong feelings.
7. reveal tendencies of shyness.

An emerging adolescent who lacks rigidity in writing is open to new ideas. He/she experiments with the original, the novel, and the unique. Joy is inherent in the ongoing and completed written product. The joy comes from an intrinsic desire to create and to communicate. Interest in writing is intense, and meaningful experiences are communicated. Motivation to achieve, develop, and grow is sequential and continuous. The creative middle school teacher sets the stage, provides readiness experiences, stimulates, and encourages emerging adolescents to appreciate and intrinsically value creativity in school and society.

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1. Tiedt, Iris M. The Language Arts Handbook. Prentice-Hall, 1983. Page 66.

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